



Culinary Masters

Story by SPC Jamie Carson
Photos by Paul Disney

FOR three days, cooking teams rotated through mobile-kitchen trailers at Fort Lee, Va.'s Training Area 42, preparing a 50-portion meal in just 3.5 hours. And, all the while, judges looked over their shoulders to find out how well individuals worked together toward the teams' goal: a large-scale, tasty, safely prepared and nutritious meal served in the field.

But this was just one event in the 27th Annual U.S. Army Culinary Arts Competition hosted by Fort Lee's Army Center of Excellence, Subsistence, and sanctioned by the American Culinary Federation.

It's the premier culinary training event in the military, said CW2 Travis Smith, U.S. Army Culinary Arts Team manager and chief of ACES's Culinary Skills Branch. The 2002 event brought together 200 soldier-chefs from 22 installations worldwide.

They competed in 14 categories, as individuals or in teams, to showcase their skills in preparing nutritious hot foods, a cold buffet, pastry and delectable chocolate masterpieces.

There were static displays, a culinary-knowledge bowl — a sort of food "Jeopardy" — and awards for Installation of the Year, Chef of the Year and Junior Chef of the Year.

Culinary exhibits at the Fort Lee Post Field House were open to the public and

SPC Jamie Carson works at the Fort Lee Public Affairs Office.



SPC David Marcelli, of Team USAREUR, prepares carrots for the entree. His partner, SGT Ned Cary, prepared the team's dessert.



Soldiers



SPC Daniel Palumbo of the 25th Inf. Div. drips a gooey confection over an upturned cup. The mixture will harden, and the hard candy will be used to decorate a desert.

included ice-carving and food-preparation demonstrations. During the latter, contestants took center stage, completing their creations in a specific amount of time as judges watched their every move.

The competition, which is judged according to strict ACF standards, was first held in 1976 as a way to motivate soldiers pursuing food-service careers, said Smith. At the same time, it promotes camaraderie and opens doors to educational opportunities among culinary professionals.

Soldiers who compete can also opt to try out for the U.S. Army Culinary Arts Team, which took the "World Champion in Military Catering" title at the Culinary Olympics held in Erfurt, Germany, in October 2001.

Judges rate entries based not only on how they taste, but also on how they're presented. Safe preparation of food and sanitation of food preparation areas are also rated, said SSG Rene Marquis, an ACES Advanced Culinary Skills instructor and competition judge.

"The competition doesn't end after the meal is served," he said. "The

judges examine everything, including what the chefs don't use."

SFC Kara McHugh, a member of the Korea Culinary Arts Team, said: "Competing in the culinary arts competition gives soldiers a chance to acquire skills and prepare foods they would never have the chance to make in the average dining facility." □

SFC Benita McKensie of the U.S. Total Army Personnel Command in Alexandria, Va., surveys the edible creations on display.



And the winners are...

Installation of the Year — Fort Bragg, N.C.

Field Cooking — Fort Lewis, Wash.

National Military Culinary Champion — SFC David Russ, Fort Bragg

Chef of the Year — SFC Willie Meeks, Fort Bragg

Junior Chef of the Year — PFC Scott Graves, U.S. Army, Europe

Nutritional Hot Food Challenge — SGT Ned Cary and SPC David Marcelli, USAREUR

Individuals selected as members of the 2002 U.S. Army Culinary Arts Team —

SFC Benedict Tesoro, Fort Lewis

SSG Paul Edwards, USAREUR

SPC Adam Lang, Fort Bragg

PFC Scott Graves, USAREUR